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ABSTRACT

The National Education Goals were adopted by the nation's governors in 1990. The March 1994 enactment of the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" made the National Education Goals federal policy and the guiding principles for a fundamental restructuring of the public education system. These goals have created a climate of education reform that demands improved professional development for educators in elementary and secondary education. Ongoing professional development aligned with changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment is emerging as an important component of national reform efforts. However, professional development has been given relatively short shrift by state and local education reformers. Teachers must have time, encouragement, and opportunity to rethink teaching strategies, to learn new subject matter, and to stay current on the latest research in their field. New approaches should link professional development programs to state reforms, fulfill teachers' need and desire to grow professionally, be an ongoing and integral part of school operations, help educators overcome isolation, and be designed at the school building or district level. States that want to assess current policies and programs should examine legal and professional definitions of professional development, funding, links with visions for systemic reform, incentives, sponsorship and service providers, research on effects, planning and coordination, and professional development "good practice." Persistent questions and issues include finding time and funding, building public support, the role of state education agencies and other organizations, the role of higher education, addressing the needs of children, and the role of technology. (JB)

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Professional Development for Educators

A Priority for Reaching High Standards

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Motivated students. Challenging academic curricula. Knowledgeable, well-prepared teachers and administrators. Classrooms that enphasize the application of knowledge to solve complex problems. A rock solid conviction on the part of educators and the public that all students can meet higher standards, regardless of race, class, or gender.

The nation's Governors espoused

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these values and priorities
when they adopted the National
Education Goals in 1990.
The March 1994 enactment of
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Today, state and local policymakers and educators are working to make the National Education Goals a reality. They are developing systemic education reform plans, rethinking curricula, crafting new standards for what students should know and be able to do, designing new systems for the transition from school to work, and working to bring assessment techniques into line with the new priorities for student learning.

There is more to reforming the nation's schools than adopting higher achievement standards for students. Also needed are educators who will embrace the notion of academic excellence for all students and carry out new approaches to instruction with professionalism, energy, commitment, and know-how. This requires motivated, highly skilled teachers who are capable of teaching the content and skills called for in the new standards and administrators who will lead schools toward achieving high standards.

Higher educational standards presume a different approach to teaching — an approach that emphasizes the connections between subject areas; that places paramount importance on the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and write and communicate effectively; that encourages students to learn from independent inquiry rather than solely from lectures; that instills in every student enthusiasm for lifelong learning and continuous growth.

Yet many educators are only vaguely aware of the massive reform effort taking place and of its underlying principles, and are much less prepared to teach new curricula and adopt new instructional techniques. More teachers need to acquire the extensive knowledge base required by new standards — particularly in the areas of math and science — and be familiar with alternative approaches to instruction and assessment. In addition, as schools continue to embrace site-based management and increased community participation, teachers and administrators need to improve the way they work with each other as well as with parents and community members.

There is a growing consensus that, along with working to strengthen student performance, the professional capacity of the nation's teaching force must also be improved. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how other educational reforms will succeed in the absence of an equally intensive effort to involve, support, and educate the educators themselves.

Ongoing professional development for educators aligned to changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment is emerging as an important component of national efforts to reform education. The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* includes a National Education Goal on professional development. States that choose to participate in Goals 2000 will directly address professional development in their planning for statewide systemic education reform. In addition, much discussion is underway currently on professional development as it relates to the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including the use of Title I (formerly Chapter I) funds and the expansion of ESEA's Eisenhower program to bolster federal support for professional development.

To date, the issue of professional development has been given relatively short shrift by state and local education reformers. Already stretched by the complex tasks of developing systemic education reform plans, writing new performance standards, and developing new assessment systems, state and local educational agencies rarely are able to focus the same amount of attention on developing professional development opportunities that support these other reform efforts. This must change.

Teachers must be given time, encouragement, and opportunities to rethink teaching strategies, to learn new subject matter, and to stay current on the latest research in their fields. For each revision in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, state and local planners also must consider how they can help teachers implement change in the classroom. Professional development must not be an afterthought to the educational reform process, but an integral part of state systemic reform plans.

New Approaches Are Needed

To be sure, states already spend large amounts of money on activities categorized as professional development. But there is a growing realization that many of these programs have little relevance in today's climate of reform. Teachers want and need time and opportunities to reform their instructional methods and hone their knowledge. Yet too often, they say, traditional professional development activities — often in the form of one-shot workshops delivered by outside experts — are of little or no use in preparing educators and administrators to respond to new expectations and imperatives.

Packaged and standardized, traditional professional development activities ignore the unique problems and circumstances of individual schools. Fragmented and diffuse in content, they often cover topics that are only distantly related to the day-to-day challenges of teaching and learning. Tacked on to the regular school schedule once or twice a year, they fail to provide ongoing opportunities for growth and reflection. Disassociated from a well-defined, coherent set of priorities, they lack focus, intensity, and an overall unifying purpose. New approaches are needed.

Participants at a recent meeting sponsored by the National Governors' Association with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York identified several criteria for creating meaningful, effective approaches to professional development.

Professional development programs should be firmly linked to state reforms in curriculum and assessment. The chief aim of professional development activities should be to help teachers and administrators improve the performance of all students.

Professional development activities should fulfill the need and desire of teachers to grow professionally throughout their careers. Under the new approach, teachers should be regarded and treated as lifelong learners.

Professional development should be an ongoing and integral part of school operations, not an add-on, piecemeal activity that occurs at the end of the day or solely on designated days.

New approaches to professional development activities should help educators overcome the isolation they experience and encourage networking, mutual support, and professional consultation among colleagues. On a regular basis teachers should be given time and opportunities to discuss teaching strategies and classroom issues with each other.

Professional development activities should be designed at the school building or district level in order to be responsive to the unique and varied needs of individual schools and communities. States should provide flexibility for schools that have ideas, and models — not regulations — for those that do not.

Assessing Current Policies and Programs

Where can states begin the process of reforming professional development? Policymakers can start by reviewing current professional development policies and programs to assess their appropriateness and identify needed changes. Current funding schemes, regulatory requirements, and contractual language may narrow the definition of professional development and limit possible reform. Thomas B. Corcoran, Senior Research Fellow for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, suggests that states seek answers to the following questions as a way to assess and recommend changes to current professional development opportunities.

How is professional development defined by teachers, district administrators, state officials, and legislators? How is it defined in collective bargaining agreements and in law and regulation?

How is professional development funded?

How is professional development linked to the improvement of teaching and to the changes in standards, curriculum, and assessment envisioned by systemic education reform?

What professional growth opportunities are being provided for teachers and administrators?

What are the incentives for teachers and administrators to participate in professional development and to improve their practice?

Who sponsors and provides formal professional development?

What is known about the effects of the current structure of professional development incentives and opportunities?

How is professional development planned and coordinated?

What is regarded as "good practice" for professional development?

Issues and Concerns

Discussions about how to improve professional development opportunities are at an early stage compared to other aspects of the education reform agenda, and many issues remain unresolved. With states and localities moving quickly to enact new standards, a concerted effort must be made to redesign systems of professional development and to assess the implications. Among the questions that remain to be answered are the following.

How can schools find more time for professional development? States that are furthest along in formulating a new approach to professional development report that one of the biggest obstacles they face is time. Although there is general agreement that the "one-shot" workshop approach must be replaced with something more ongoing, it is difficult to see where these more frequent professional development activities will fit into already packed school schedules. Compounding the problem is the fact that in most communities, parents are demanding more instructional time for students; these parents are not likely to support a new professional development system that pulls teachers out of the classroom more.

Where will the funding come from? Depending on what it looks like, a new system of professional development will require a comprehensive analysis on how it will be financed. There are tough financial choices implied in reforming professional development, such as reallocating current resources, modifying staffing patterns in schools and districts, changing salary schedule incentives, and/or rethinking appropriate class size configurations. Issues such as these need to be examined before additional funding is infused into a new system for professional development.

How can we build public support for professional development? The public does not currently see professional development for educators as an urgent priority. Governors have an important role to play in articulating the crucial connection between improving students' academic performance and strengthening the knowledge and skills of teachers and administrators.

What is the proper role of state education agencies as approaches to professional development change? Current thinking concerning professional development suggests a different role for state education agencies. Many people seeking more effective approaches are wary of state agencies creating yet another layer of bureaucracy, regulations, and red tape — an outcome that would only serve to increase existing cynicism and indifference on the part of teachers and principals about professional development activities. Teachers and administrators should be full partners in creating better, more meaningful professional development opportunities. State education agencies should provide ideas, encouragement, and assistance for bottom-up change, adopting a more flexible and collaborative approach toward local school districts and schools, and moving away from the command and control techniques of regulation and monitoring.

What will be the role of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in state efforts to address professional development? The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is currently working with teachers and national teacher organizations to establish standards and assessment procedures for national board certification of teachers. Those educators participating in this process will, by definition, be participating in professional development. It will be important for states to explore how the board certification process can become part of a state's approach to the training and ongoing professional development experiences of educators. The efforts of the NBPTS also may help states rethink their role in the certification and licensure of teachers and administrators.

How will colleges and universities be involved in new approaches to professional development? State colleges and universities are the primary trainers of the teachers and administrators who work in America's public schools. In addition, most educators receive continuing education credits and salary differentials for courses they take at colleges and universities (many times regardless of the linkages between these courses and what or who they teach). As elementary and secondary school systems work to meet the demands of systemic education reform, higher education institutions that train educators need to make parallel changes. Greater coordination between elementary and secondary institutions and higher education is needed so that initial training and ongoing learning experiences for educators are consistent with the goals of systemic education reform.

How will new approaches to professional development address the special needs of children? Ongoing professional development for educators must include opportunities for teachers and administrators to gain knowledge and experience for their work with children who have special needs. Educators need access to learning opportunities that address areas such as second-language acquisition, special learning needs or disabilities, and flexible learning environments for a diverse group of students.

What role can technology play? As the development of the "information highway" continues and other advances in telecommunications occur, there are implications for the professional development of educators. Some teachers and administrators are currently linked to electronic networks that focus on curriculum design, assessment development, and teaching strategies and techniques. These types of networks and other opportunities for sharing work and experiences through telecommunications, such as live video conferences, will increase in the next few years. As this occurs, states must examine how technology can be used for professional development and whether educators have equitable access to available technology and telecommunications systems.

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